Perspectives of Consent Silence in Cyberbullying

Dana RAD¹, Tiberiu DUGHİ²,
Alina ROMAN³, Sonia IGNAT⁴

¹ PhD, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad,
Faculty of Educational Sciences,
Psychology and Social Sciences, Arad,
Romania

² PhD, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad,
Faculty of Educational Sciences,
Psychology and Social Sciences, Arad,
Romania

³ PhD, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad,
Faculty of Educational Sciences,
Psychology and Social Sciences, Arad,
Romania

⁴ PhD, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad,
Faculty of Educational Sciences,
Psychology and Social Sciences, Arad,
Romania

Abstract: Whether the silence of bystanders is consent or not in cyberbullying type incidents has risen a scientifically debate in the field of victim-aggressor-witness dynamics research. Silence implies consent represents a concept of social interaction, which generally states that people tend to assume lack of a response or opinion to an action as a tacit approval of that action. Our research team has developed the project *Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying*, aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of different cyberbullying aspects in online environments among youth. Our focus was in analyzing the relationship between consent silence, seen as a core concept in bystanders' mindset and other psychological or behavioral traits like awareness, anonymity, fear, shame, school popularity and self-worth that fuel the tank of silence, in 140 Romanian high school students. Results show that consent silence represents the most significant predictor of future bystander, aggressor or victim type of response behavior when youth are directly or indirectly involved in cyberbullying incidents. Conclusions and implications are discussed.

Keywords: *cyberbullying; consent silence; bystanders; aggressor; victim.*

How to cite: Rad, D., Dughî, T., Roman, A., & Ignat, S. (2019). Perspectives of Consent Silence in Cyberbullying. *Postmodern Openings*, 10(2), 57-73. doi:10.18662/po/71

1. Introduction

An important aspect of postmodern culture is electronic digital overload. As characterized by Arnold R. Eiser (2015), postmodern influences on human behavior include ascendancy of digital communication, computerized entertainment, Internet usage, violent video games, cyberbullying, large-scale bureaucracy, multiculturalism, and growing anomie. The postmodern human, or *homo technologicus* is forced to live the online aggression on a daily basis, through different types of stressors that are impossible to avoid when necessarily and continuously being connected to the Internet.

Harassment, known as cyberbullying when occurring on the Internet, it involves the use of information and communication technologies such as mail, mobile phones, defamatory websites, blogs, etc., with the intention of deliberately, repeatedly and hostile attacking an individual or a group of individuals (Willard & Steiner, 2007). Cyberbullying refers to online posting threats, sexual remarks, hate inciting, victimization, gossip and instigation of other people at malicious misdeeds against the victims, and the display of any false statements which aim to humiliate the victim (Smith, del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). These threats may be private, or public on forums and discussion boards. Cyber aggressors can disclose real, personal data about their victims on specific sites and forums, publishing materials on their behalf in order to defame and to ridicule them.

Cyberbullying usually occurs in the context of using instant messaging applications like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, MSN Messenger, etc. It can get even bigger by becoming public when it comes to blogs or social networks like Myspace or Facebook, or hosting sites like YouTube. Mobile phone applications such as SMS or video captured with the phone camera can also be used to harass that way.

Among the effects of harassment we can mention: decrease in self-esteem and sense of security, feelings of fear, anger, shame, refusal to attend school, increase of anxiety, increase in the possibility of stress disorders, avoidance of group activities, social withdrawal (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Bauman & Newman, 2013; Beckman, Hagquist, & Hellström, 2012; Dooley, Shaw, & Cross, 2012; Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, & Chang, 2011; Machmutow, Perren, Sticca, & Alsaker, 2012; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Vazsonyi, Machackova, Sevcikova, Smahel, & Cerna, 2012; Wigderson & Lynch, 2013; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007).

Compared to classical bullying, seen as a form of psychological aggression that does not involve the existence of a conflict based on a real problem, but on the desire of some people to gain power and authority by putting others in a bad position, regarding the specific environment of manifestation, cyberbullying acquires some own characteristics. Thus, for Grigg (2010), the requirement of "force imbalance" between the victim and the aggressor and the "repetition" (act) needs to be re-evaluated and reinterpreted to be applied to cyberbullying (Grigg, 2010).

The old variables defining the imbalanced force in traditional bullying, namely age, sex and physical strength, seem to no longer be relevant in the electronic environment where anonymity and physical distance are characteristics that define the interaction between people (Grigg, 2010; Smith et al., 2008). It can be eventually accepted that cyberbullying requires increased social and digital skills for the aggressor (Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013), but mastering them does not guarantee the possibility of not becoming a victim of cyberbullying, in the same way as in traditional bullying, increased physical strength minimizes or even eliminates the risk of becoming a bullying victim.

The task of creating a psychological portrait of young aggressors and victims is difficult, as there is no universal portrait of these. However, we can identify the psychological traits of aggressors or victims, as well as the risk factors that are involved in the emergence and maintenance of cyberbullying behaviors.

An aggressive young person may have specific personality characteristics such as passivity or obedience: increased levels of shyness, anxiety, introversion, low level of self-esteem, the presence of feelings of sadness or other negative feelings. Also, on a social level, these young people tend to be more retired and have a narrower social circle.

In the case of cyberbullying behaviors, there are some common features or manifestations such as: increased levels of aggression, negative attitudes towards the aggressed person, aggressive style of communication, poor socialization skills and empathy. Last but not least, many studies show that young aggressors can, in turn, be victims of other cyberbullying behaviors by older or stronger perceived individuals. In these situations, aggressive behaviors can be seen as problem-solving methods and online adjustment of negative self-image.

It is considered that the first step in preventing and reducing the frequency of cyberbullying behaviors is to recognize the existence of this phenomenon and identify both indicators that indicate the manifestation of

behaviors (for example avoidance) as well as the possible consequences of repetitive and cunning manifestations of these behaviors.

Adults hardly or very lately identify cyberbullying behaviors, which is reinforced by the fact that most of the young people who have been victims choose not to talk about their own negative experiences for various reasons, such as feelings of shame, fear of a possible rebellion of the aggressor against the others. Another factor contributing to the persistence of the cyberbullying phenomenon is that most of those who observe acts of aggression do not intervene to stop these behaviors, sometimes even encouraging the behaviors. In fact, some studies show that the tendency of other young witnesses to remain passive and to observe cyberbullying acts without intervening has the function of encouraging aggressors to continue assaulting the victim.

In the long run, cyberbullying behaviors can promote the development of negative self-beliefs, affecting the individual's ability to make decisions and solve problems autonomously in adulthood. Relatively speaking, a person who has experimented with some forms of cyberbullying will have negative attitudes towards the world, making it difficult to establish relationships of trust with others or close relations. Last but not least, one of the most serious consequences of cyberbullying is the risk of suicide. According to the studies, cyber is considered a high risk factor for youth suicide attempts, along with other factors such as domestic problems, traumatic history, depression or belonging to a high-risk of exclusion group. Although it is not a major cause of suicide, cyberbullying plays an important role in the appearance of negative feelings and beliefs towards oneself and the world such as helplessness, pessimism or depression, which in turn can contribute to the development of suicidal thoughts (Cowie, 2013).

As depicted in the literature, the silence of the victims, bystanders and of course the aggressor, keeps the phenomenon alive and active. We have conceptualized this kind of silence and passiveness as consent silence.

The main focus on this paper is to analyze the implications consent silence has on perceived roles of aggressor, victim and bystander in a cyberbullying incident.

2. Research methodology

In the light of this research, consent silence represents a behavioral choice, it is an observed action, meanwhile the victim/aggressor/bystander position is a perceived role youth assume when going into online discussions, therefore, this study considers consent silence as an

independent variable and also the most important predictor of the role choice, and victim/aggressor/bystander perceived roles as dependent variables.

This research focuses on online measuring youth perceptions, assumes that single item measures owns the same efficacy in identifying statistical trends like multiple items scales. Single item measures have been successfully used by researchers when measuring quality of life (Zimmerman et al., 2006). Single item scales are usually used to represent global constructs (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997) that are conceptualized as mono facet or dimensions, like the ones we have focused on, consent silence and aggressor/victim/bystander perceived role.

The item that measured consent silence referred to the pact of silence youth take when going online that states that whatever happens online should stay online. The responses were rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for total agreement and 5 stands for total disagreement.

This research start from the hypothesis that consent silence is the most important predictor of victim, aggressor and bystander perceived roles in cyberbullying type incidents, among other important predictors described in the research methodology section.

In order to test our hypothesis, we have used SPSS' multiple linear regression analysis, where perceived aggressor/victim and bystander roles were the dependent variable and the independent variables were: previous experience with cyberbullying, reporting intentions, **consent silence**, voice, cyberbullying perception, academic self-efficacy, cyberbullying motivations, victim empathy, reactions to the aggression and school popularity.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 140 high school students aged 17-19, of both sexes, 68 male (48.6%) and 72 female (51.4%), from both rural and urban environmental origins, that have voluntarily responded to the online questionnaire that was shared via social media platforms, during the first four months of 2018.

3. Results

The hypothesis of this research is that the consent silence is the most important predictor of victim, aggressor and bystander perceived roles in cyberbullying type incidents, among other important predictors described in the following.

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the **victim perception** (DV, $m=1.62$, $SD=0.72$) based on their: previous experience with cyberbullying (**IV₁**, $m=3.21$, $SD=1.32$), reporting intentions (**IV₂**,

m=3.94, SD=1.11), consent silence (**IV**₃, m=1.61, SD=0.91), voice (**IV**₄, m=4.06, SD=1.13), cyberbullying perception (**IV**₅, m=3.60, SD=1.22), academic self-efficacy (**IV**₆, m=2.46, SD=0.51), cyberbullying motivations (**IV**₇, m=4.71, SD=2.31), victim empathy (**IV**₈, m=2.52, SD=0.83), reactions to the aggression (**IV**₉, m=5.31, SD=2.55) and school popularity (**IV**₁₀, m=3.30, SD=1.03). Our model investigates the degree to which selected independent variables (**IV**₁- **IV**₁₀) predict the dependent variable VD, victim perception. A significant regression equation was found ($F(10, 129) = 4.819$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .216. Youth predicted victim perception equals to $-0.305 + 0.020(\mathbf{IV}_1) + 0.037(\mathbf{IV}_2) + 0.367(\mathbf{IV}_3) - 0.070(\mathbf{IV}_4) + 0.033(\mathbf{IV}_5) + 0.100(\mathbf{IV}_6) - 0.085(\mathbf{IV}_7) + 0.172(\mathbf{IV}_8) + 0.097(\mathbf{IV}_9) + 0.150(\mathbf{IV}_{10})$, where **IV**₁- **IV**₆ and **IV**₁₀ are coded as 1 = *totally disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *totally agree*, and **IV**₇ is coded 1 = *cool*, 2 = *unsure*, 3 = *furious*, 4 = *jealous*, 5 = *fun*, 6 = *mischievous*, 7 = *bored*, 8 = *defense mechanism*, 9 = *family issues*, 10 = *other*, **IV**₈ is coded 1 = *I am sorry, I have nothing to do with it*, 2 = *they deserve it*, 3 = *it is a serious issue that we have to stop*, **IV**₉ is coded 1 = *have aggressed somebody*, 2 = *have been aggressed*, 3 = *have online aggressed somebody*, 4 = *have been online aggressed*, 5 = *I have no friends*. As results show, consent silence is a significant predictor of youth victim perception ($B=0.367$, $SE=0.074$, $Beta=0.466$, $t=4.961$ at a $p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Regression analysis results for predicting the *victim perception*

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.522 _a	.272	.216	.642	.272	4.819	10	129	.000

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.838	10	1.984	4.819	.000^b
	Residual	53.098	129	.412		
	Total	72.936	139			

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying victim

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying, IV2. Reporting intentions, IV3. Consent silence, IV4. Voice, IV5. Cyberbullying perception, IV6. Academic self-efficacy, IV7. Cyberbullying motivations, IV8. Victim empathy IV9. Reactions to the aggression, IV10. School popularity

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.305	.606		-.503	.615
IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying	.020	.044	.037	.459	.647
IV2. Reporting intentions	.037	.056	.057	.666	.506
IV3. Consent silence	.367	.074	.466	4.961	.000
IV4. Voice	-.070	.057	-.109	-1.224	.223
IV5. Cyberbullying perception	.033	.049	.057	.689	.492
IV6. Academic self-efficacy	.100	.112	.071	.894	.373
IV7. Cyberbullying motivations	-.085	.025	-.272	-3.453	.001
IV8. Victim empathy	.172	.078	.198	2.209	.029
IV9. Reactions to the aggression	.097	.023	.340	4.127	.000
IV10. School popularity	.150	.064	.213	2.330	.021

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying victim

Altogether, in Model 1, presented in Table 1, the victim perception model, selected independent variables **IV₁-IV₁₀** account for 21% variance of the victim perception, with consent silence **IV₃** being a significant predictor.

A second multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the **aggressor perception** (**DV**, $m=1.33$, $SD=0.61$) based on their: previous experience with cyberbullying (**IV**₁, $m=3.21$, $SD=1.32$), reporting intentions (**IV**₂, $m=3.94$, $SD=1.11$), consent silence (**IV**₃, $m=1.61$, $SD=0.91$), voice (**IV**₄, $m=4.06$, $SD=1.13$), cyberbullying perception (**IV**₅, $m=3.60$, $SD=1.22$), academic self-efficacy (**IV**₆, $m=2.46$, $SD=0.51$), cyberbullying motivations (**IV**₇, $m=4.71$, $SD=2.31$), victim empathy (**IV**₈, $m=2.52$, $SD=0.83$), reactions to the aggression (**IV**₉, $m=5.31$, $SD=2.55$) and school popularity (**IV**₁₀, $m=3.30$, $SD=1.03$). Our model investigates the degree to which selected independent variables (**IV**₁ - **IV**₁₀) predict the dependent variable **VD**, aggressor perception. A significant regression equation was found ($F(10, 129) = 5.411, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .295.

Youth predicted aggressor perception equals to $1.147 + 0.015(\text{IV}_1) - 0.037(\text{IV}_2) + 0.269(\text{IV}_3) - 0.120(\text{IV}_4) + 0.028(\text{IV}_5) + 0.076(\text{IV}_6) - 0.067(\text{IV}_7) - 0.071(\text{IV}_8) + 0.036(\text{IV}_9) + 0.106(\text{IV}_{10})$, where **IV**₁ - **IV**₆ and **IV**₁₀ are coded as 1 = *totally disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *totally agree*, and **IV**₇ is coded 1 = *cool*, 2 = *unsure*, 3 = *furious*, 4 = *jealous*, 5 = *fun*, 6 = *mischievous*, 7 = *bored*, 8 = *defense mechanism*, 9 = *family issues*, 10 = *other*, **IV**₈ is coded 1 = *I am sorry, I have nothing to do with it*, 2 = *they deserve it*, 3 = *it is a serious issue that we have to stop*, **IV**₉ is coded 1 = *have aggressed somebody*, 2 = *have been aggressed*, 3 = *have online aggressed somebody*, 4 = *have been online aggressed*, 5 = *I have no friends*. As results show, consent silence is a significant predictor of youth aggressor perception ($B=0.269$, $SE=0.062$, $Beta=0.401$, $t=4.340$ at a $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Regression analysis results for predicting the **aggressor perception**

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.544 _a	.295	.241	.537	.295	5.411	10	129	.000

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying aggressor

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of	df	Mean	F	Sig.
		Squares		Square		
1	Regression	15.628	10	1.563	5.411	.000^b
	Residual	37.258	129	.289		
	Total	52.886	139			

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying aggressor

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying, IV2. Reporting intentions, IV3. Consent silence, IV4. Voice, IV5. Cyberbullying perception, IV6. Academic self-efficacy, IV7. Cyberbullying motivations, IV8. Victim empathy IV9. Reactions to the aggression, IV10. School popularity

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.147		2.259	.026
	IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying	.015	.037	.405	.686
	IV2. Reporting intentions	-.037	.047	-.794	.428
	IV3. Consent silence	.269	.062	4.340	.000
	IV4. Voice	-.120	.048	-2.515	.013
	IV5. Cyberbullying perception	.028	.041	.690	.491
	IV6. Academic self-efficacy	.076	.094	.816	.416
	IV7. Cyberbullying motivations	-.067	.021	-3.250	.001
	IV8. Victim empathy	-.071	.065	-1.095	.276
	IV9. reactions to the aggression	.036	.020	1.842	.068
	IV10. School popularity	.106	.054	1.971	.051

a. Dependent Variable: 2.Perceived cyberbullying aggressor

Altogether, in Model 1, presented in Table 2, the aggressor perception model, selected independent variables **IV₁-IV₁₀** account for 24% variance of the aggressor perception, with consent silence **IV₃** being a significant predictor.

A third multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the **bystander perception (DV, m=1.94, SD=0.96)** based on their: previous experience with cyberbullying (**IV₁, m=3.21, SD=1.32**), reporting intentions (**IV₂, m=3.94, SD=1.11**), consent silence (**IV₃, m=1.61, SD=0.91**), voice (**IV₄, m=4.06, SD=1.13**), cyberbullying perception (**IV₅, m=3.60, SD=1.22**), academic self-efficacy (**IV₆, m=2.46, SD=0.51**), cyberbullying motivations (**IV₇, m=4.71, SD=2.31**), victim empathy (**IV₈, m=2.52, SD=0.83**), reactions to the aggression (**IV₉, m=5.31, SD=2.55**) and school popularity (**IV₁₀, m=3.30, SD=1.03**). Our model investigates the degree to which selected independent variables (**IV₁ - IV₁₀**) predict the dependent variable **VD**, bystander perception. A significant regression equation was found ($F(10, 129) = 6.713, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .342.

Youth predicted bystander perception equals to $0.766 - 0.121(IV_1) + 0.117(IV_2) + 0.539(IV_3) - 0.075(IV_4) - 0.093(IV_5) + 0.423(IV_6) - 0.063(IV_7) - 0.007(IV_8) + 0.029(IV_9) - 0.002(IV_{10})$, where **IV₁ – IV₆** and **IV₁₀** are coded as 1 = *totally disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *totally agree*, and **IV₇** is coded 1 = *cool*, 2 = *unsure*, 3 = *furios*, 4= *jealous*, 5 = *fun*, 6 = *mischievous*, 7 = *bored*, 8 = *defense mechanism*, 9 = *family issues*, 10 = *other*, **IV₈** is coded 1 = *I am sorry, I have nothing to do with it*, 2 = *they deserve it*, 3 = *it is a serious issue that we have to stop*, **IV₉** is coded 1 = *have aggressed somebody*, 2 = *have been aggressed*, 3 = *have online aggressed somebody*, 4 = *have been online aggressed*, 5 = *I have no friends*. As results show, consent silence is a significant predictor of youth bystander perception ($B=0.539, SE=0.093, Beta=0.515, t=5.772$ at a $p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Regression analysis results for predicting the *bystander perception*

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.585 ^a	.342	.291	.809	.342	6.713	10	129	.000

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying bystander

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of	df	Mean	F	Sig.
		Squares		Square		
1	Regression	43.954	10	4.395	6.713	.000^b
	Residual	84.468	129	.655		
	Total	128.421	139			

a. Dependent Variable: 1.Perceived cyberbullying bystander

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying, IV2. Reporting intentions, IV3. Consent silence, IV4. Voice, IV5. Cyberbullying perception, IV6. Academic self-efficacy, IV7. Cyberbullying motivations, IV8. Victim empathy IV9. Reactions to the aggression, IV10. School popularity

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t		Sig.
	(Constant)	.766	.765	1.002		.318
1	IV1. Previous experience with cyberbullying	-.121	.056	-.166	-2.154	.033
	IV2. Reporting intentions	.117	.070	.136	1.662	.099
	IV3. Consent silence	.539	.093	.515	5.772	.000
	IV4. Voice	-.075	.072	-.088	-1.046	.298
	IV5. Cyberbullying perception	-.093	.061	-.119	-1.521	.131
	IV6. Academic self-efficacy	.423	.141	.226	2.998	.003
	IV7. Cyberbullying motivations	-.063	.031	-.151	-2.026	.045
	IV8. Victim empathy	-.007	.098	-.006	-.071	.943
	IV9. reactions to the aggression	.029	.030	.076	.974	.332
	IV10. School popularity	-.002	.081	-.002	-.028	.978

a. Dependent Variable: 3.Perceived cyberbullying bystander

Altogether, in Model 1, presented in Table 3, the bystander perception model, selected independent variables **IV₁-IV₁₀** account for 29%

variance of the bystander perception, with consent silence **IV₃** being a significant predictor.

As depicted in the three models, consent silence represents the most significant predictor of the all three perceived roles of victim, aggressor and bystander, thus validating our hypothesis.

The statistical implication of these results is that the more agreement adopted by youth towards a pact of silence of whatever happens in the online, the more the risk of becoming a victim, aggressor or bystander in a cyberbullying situation.

4. Discussions and implications

As emphasized by the statistical analysis, consent silence represents a significant feature for the three possible roles in which an online user can be placed in any cyberbullying situation. When talking about aggressor, victim or bystander's role, the differences occur in the motives behind silence. Research on aggression underlines the fact that aggressor does not talk about the aggression - except for serious pathological cases – due to a lack of empathy towards the victim. Being the author of aggression, it is to be expected that the aggressor may not perceive the act as aggressive, consequently there is no reason to be empathetic; or there is the situation when the aggression brings pleasure, when we cannot speak about empathy either (Suler, 2004). In these cases, the aggressor is centered on himself, in a completely egocentric manner of reporting to the world, and does not consider the other person as a possible supplier of his pleasure as a result of the aggression. Exposing aggression is often done in these cases by the aggressor to multiply the victim's suffering through public exposure, if it is not already public, as is often the case of online. However, in these situations, we are in the out of silence zone. In our view, this is maintained by the aggressor as the continuation of the aggression. Thus, the victim is still being ignored, regardless of the fact that the person is in distress. Obviously, the absence of direct contact with the person, specific to the online environment, keeps the aggressor away from being empathic with the victim.

On the other hand, the victim remains in consent silence due to fear of public abuse. Most of the time, it has already been exposed to the public through the online aggression. Shame, feelings of intimate exposure and vulnerability are often enough to make the victim silent about the aggression, even when it occurs continuously. Victims often choose not to talk about the aggression with responsible people, either because of the

belief that nobody can do anything about it, either because of the sense of shame or even guilt. The idea that their image will be negatively affected in the eyes of those who do not know about the situation of aggression, represents a key factor in keeping the silence. They prefer to be further aggressed in the online environment than to expose themselves as vulnerable people outside of the virtual environment. Sometimes it might be added to this reason the feeling of fear of being judged or accused by persons outside of the aggression situation who did not even have a bystander role to play until the moment of breaking the silence.

Regarding the bystanders' silence, we can discuss a common situation encountered among online users - the state of desensitization, a non-empathetic response (Barlińska, Szuster, & Winiewski, 2013). Massive access to information with a high degree of aggressiveness or a lower degree but constantly in the field of a person's stimuli, may lead to a lack of reaction to aggressive situations. Even if an emotional reaction such as empathy, compassion, or victim identification occurs to the person witnessing the aggression, there is no authentic reaction because the output is a passive attitude, accompanied by the sense of lack of authority and the irrelevance of the intervention - "Who am I to interfere?", "It's not my job."; or the responsibility is attributed to others - "It's the authorities' matter to interfere.", "Surely others have already responded." The bystander sums up to notice the aggressive act, sometimes emotionally reacts, and then enters the silence zone (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2012; Burton, Florell, & Wygant, 2013; Davis & Nixon, 2012). This process allows the aggressor to continue his actions against the victim, the bystander through consent silence becoming an element of an environment that can be interpreted by the aggressor as approving.

Even though the three roles are different, it is obvious that the consent silent is a predictor of all, different motivations feeding them. However, given the specificities of interactions in the online environment, we can conclude that a common factor of silence is the depersonalization of the three actors in the aggressive act. None of them is in direct contact with others, and often it is not even clearly identifiable. Until the victim, aggressor or bystander are not significant from the emotional point of view, personal significance it is needed so that the chances of going out of silence into the voice can increase.

Based on this observation, we can build educational intervention programs. This intervention can be done at the group level, accompanied by information and prevention modules, as well as at the individual level, when we are identifying people in one of the three roles and deciding to overcome

consent silence. Individually, the person has to be differentiated according to the role played in the aggressive act: as an aggressor - the use of empathy stimulations techniques, to understand the need for aggression and to reduce it. For the victim, self-confidence, emotional management and communication enhancement techniques are useful to stimulate the formation of a self-image that allows the person to report in a balanced way to himself, to others and to reality.

We believe that informational programs on psychological, legal, and social aspects of cyberbullying conducted at school level would add to the awareness of the roles played by each in these situations. Involving young people in activities that do not imply their online presence like participating in Workshops in various educational fields, would reduce the online time spent by them. As with any act of aggression, it is important to avoid the environment that generates and sustains the aggressive act. With regard to the online environment, it is important to understand that there is no need to completely abandon the use of these tools, but it is necessary to select and reconsider the type of services, the time spent online, and how to generally report to this reality. Authentic contacts are recommended, given the direct interactions in the existential environment, precisely to bring extra implication and authenticity to these relationships. Directly reporting to others is important, not just the technology mediated interaction in the online environment. An important direction is to encourage and support individuals at risk of cyberbullying to engage in socializing activities within a significant non-online group. Another important component in the prevention of these behaviors is represented by the family; it is recommended that parents should participate in these activities involving youth or that specific parenting activities are to be carried out.

5. Limitation

The limitation of this research is that the population that took part in the survey is 140 high school students, aged between aged 17-19,, from the rural and urban area of Arad district, population that might not be representative for the general population, thus conclusions and implications should address adolescents from West Romania.

6. Acknowledgement

The project *Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying*, ID 2016-3-TR01-KA205-036619 under Erasmus+, had been developed by our research team aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in online

environments among youth, to develop educational resources for professionals involved in youth activities in order to prevent these type behaviors. One of our first objectives is to analyze the implications consent silence has on perceived roles of aggressor, victim and bystander in a cyberbullying incident. In this regard, we have designed an online questionnaire that aims to gather descriptive data, general perception about the frequency and typology of cyberbullying type incidents, perceptions about the safety of the educational environment, bystander motives, perceived parental support, and an auto evaluation scale centered on self-efficacy perceptions.

The online questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms (Facebook, intranet, Linkedin) and the participants have voluntarily and consensually responded to questions. They have previously agreed to participating in this research.

We greatly appreciate the support received through the collaborative work undertaken with Uludag University from Bursa, Turkey, Centre Neuro Psychiatrique St-Martin from Dave, Belgium and none of the less, Asociación, Cultural Social Educativa Segundas Oportunidades, from Telde, Canary Islands during the phase of questionnaire design, data collection and results preparing.

We highly appreciate and thank all those who have helped in carrying out this research: Daniel Dixon, Jocelyn Deloyer, Onur Tahmaz, Assist.dr. Edgar Demeter, Prof.dr. Ramona Lile. The research team that prepared this report is formed of Assoc. Prof.dr. Tiberiu Dughi, Prof.dr. Alina Roman, and Lect.dr. Sonia Ignat, coordinated by Lect.dr. Dana Rad.

References

- Agatston, P., Kowalski, R., & Limber, S. (2012). Youth views on cyberbullying. In J. W. Patchin & S. Hinduja (Eds), *Cyberbullying prevention and response: Expert perspectives* (pp. 55–71). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Barlińska, J., Szuster, A., & Winiewski, M. (2013). Cyberbullying among adolescent bystanders: Role of the communication medium, form of violence, and empathy. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), 37–51. doi:10.1002/casp.2137
- Bastiaensens, S., Vande Bosch, H., Poels, K., Van Cleemput, K., DeSmet, A., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2014). Cyberbullying on social network sites. An experimental study into bystanders' behavioural intentions to help the victim or reinforce the bully. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 259–271. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.036

- Bauman, S., & Newman, M. L. (2013). Testing assumptions about cyberbullying: perceived distress associated with acts of conventional and cyber bullying. *Psychology of Violence*, 3(1), 27–38. doi:10.1037/a0029867
- Beckman, L., Hagquist, C., & Hellström, L. (2012). Does the association with psychosomatic health problems differ between cyberbullying and traditional bullying? *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 17(3–4), 421–434. doi:10.1080/13632752.2012.704228
- Burton, K. A., Florell, D., & Wygant, D. B. (2013). The role of peer attachment and normative beliefs about aggression on traditional bullying and cyberbullying. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(2), 103–115. doi:10.1002/pits.21663
- Cowie, H. (2013). Cyberbullying and its impact on young people's emotional health and well-being. *The Psychiatrist*, 37(5), 167–170. doi:10.1192/pb.bp.112.040840
- Davis, S., & Nixon, C. (2012). Empowering bystanders. In J. Patchin & S. Hinduja (Eds.), *Cyberbullying prevention and response: Expert perspectives* (pp. 93–113). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Dooley, J. J., Shaw, T., & Cross, D. (2012). The association between the mental health and behavioural problems of students and their reactions to cyber-victimization. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 275–289. doi:10.1080/17405629.2011.648425
- Eiser, A. R. (2015). Postmodern Stress Disorder (PMSD): A possible new disorder. *The American Journal of Medicine*, 128(11), 1178–1181. doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.04.039
- Goebert, D., Else, I., Matsu, C., Chung-Do, J., & Chang, J. Y. (2011). The impact of cyberbullying on substance use and mental health in a multiethnic sample. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 15(8), 1282–1286. doi:10.1007/s10995-010-0672-x
- Grigg, D. W. (2010). Cyber-aggression: Definition and concept of cyberbullying. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 20(2), 143–156. doi:10.1375/ajgc.20.2.143
- Kernaghan, D., & Elwood, J. (2013). All the (cyber)world's a stage: Framing cyberbullying as a performance. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 7(1). doi:10.5817/cp2013-1-5
- Kowalski, R. M., & Limber, S. P. (2013). Psychological, physical, and academic correlates of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 53(1), 13–20. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.09.018
- Machmutow, K., Perren, S., Sticca, F., & Alsaker, F. D. (2012). Peer victimization and depressive symptoms: Can specific coping strategies buffer the negative impact of cybervictimisation? *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 17(3–4), 403–420. doi:10.1080/13632752.2012.704310

- Smith, P. K., del Barrio, C., & Tokunaga, R. (2013). Definitions of cyberbullying: How useful are the terms? In S. Bauman, D. Cross & J. Walker (Eds.), *Principles of cyberbullying research: Definitions, measures, and methodology* (pp. 26–45). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Smith, P. K., Mahdavi, J., Carvalho, M., Fisher, S., Russell, S., & Tippett, N. (2008). Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(4), 376–385. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01846.x
- Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 7(3), 321–326. doi:10.1089/1094931041291295
- Vazsonyi, A. T., Machackova, H., Sevcikova, A., Smahel, D., & Cerna, A. (2012). Cyberbullying in context: Direct and indirect effects by low self-control across 25 European countries. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 210–227. doi:10.1080/17405629.2011.644919
- Wanous, J. P., Reichers, A. E., & Hudy, M. J. (1997). Overall job satisfaction: How good are single-item measures? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(2), 247–252. doi:10.1037//0021-9010.82.2.247
- Wigderson, S., & Lynch, M. (2013). Cyber- and traditional peer victimization: Unique relationships with adolescent well-being. *Psychology of Violence*, 3(4), 297–309. doi:10.1037/a0033657
- Willard, N. E., & Steiner, K. (2007). *Cyberbullying and cyberthreats: Responding to the challenge of online social aggression, threats, and distress*. Champaign, USA: Research Press.
- Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2007). Prevalence and frequency of Internet harassment instigation: implications for adolescent health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41(2), 189–195. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.03.005
- Zimmerman, M., Ruggero, C. J., Chelminski, I., Young, D., Posternak, M. A., Friedman, M., Boerescu, D., & Attiullah, N. (2006). Developing brief scales for use in clinical practice: the reliability and validity of single-item self-report measures of depression symptom severity, psychosocial impairment due to depression, and quality of life. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 67(10), 1536–1541. doi:10.4088/jcp.v67n1007